

Reception and Unveiling of Exhibit: Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream

More than 200 people, including legislators, community and civic leaders and enthusiastic children, attended a festive reception and historic unveiling of the exhibit; “Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream” at the State Capitol on February 6.

The unveiling of the 22-panel traveling exhibit and reception kicked off the Centennial Celebration of Allensworth, one of the first towns founded, financed and governed by African Americans.

“I am proud to have partnered with the California State Parks and the California African American Museum for this noteworthy effort,” Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus told the gathering. “Allensworth is truly the visionary settlement established by African Americans in 1908 and tonight this exhibit demonstrates the town’s lasting impact on California’s diverse communities.

The exhibit, commissioned by the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, will be housed at the State Capitol until March 31st and will then travel to Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, the Bay Area and Allensworth over the next year.”

The story of Col. Allensworth and the town is one of determination, self reliance and self respect. It was a progressive community developed as a showplace for civic engagement, culture and ideals.

However, Allensworth, which has been dubbed “The town that refused to die” still has challenges to its existence.

Although much of the town has been made into Col. Allensworth State Park, even that was in jeopardy last year when a dairy sought to locate close enough to one side of the park to degrade it with possible odors flies and water pollution.

Assemblywoman Amina Carter (D-San Bernardino) authored a bill on behalf of the Legislative Black Caucus that would create a buffer zone around the park. A groundswell of support led the Governor to purchase a protective easement from the proposed dairy's owner.

This was only a stop gap measure, however, and the bill is still pending as a possible way to ensure the future protection of other park boundaries.

“The vision for Allensworth was a thriving municipality where African Americans functioned independently from, yet cooperatively with, the wider society to achieve self-respect, self-sufficiency, self-determination and prosperity. We still share much of his vision today as we work toward a greater realization of the California Dream,” said Senator Ridley-Thomas, who spearheaded the development of the exhibit.

Also speaking at the reception was State Parks Director Ruth Coleman, who welcomed the exhibit to the Capitol.

“As the caretakers of Col. Allensworth State Historic Park, we are very pleased to work in partnership with Sen. Ridley-Thomas, the Black Caucus and the California African American Museum to tell the important story of Allensworth’s impact on California history and culture,” Coleman said. “This past year the future of Allensworth was threatened. Today, it is a pleasure to look forward to this centennial, knowing Allensworth is protected and to dream of the possibilities before us,” Coleman added.

Carolyn Webb de Macias, recent governor appointee and Chair, State Board of Directors for CAAM, said she looked forward to the exhibit’s visit to CAAM, where residents could see the historical importance of the town as well as evidence of the historic ties between Col. Allensworth and Los Angeles.

Senator Ridley-Thomas acknowledged the presence of Members of the Legislative Black Caucus and Members of the Legislature to the event. Among those attending where: Senators: Christine Kehoe, Dean Florez, Jenny Orpeza, Jack Scott and Dave Cogdill. Assembly members attending were, Karen Bass, Amina Carter, Mike Davis Curren Price, Dave Jones, Mark Leno, Laurie Saldana, Noreen Evans, Mike Villines, and Nicole Parra

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